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IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE **POWER OF PERFORMING (POP) ARTS**



Mindscape 702708, Kathy Tupper

Kathy Tupper lives in Nashville and is part of the Healing Arts Project, Inc., which offers art classes to mental health consumers.

"Creating art makes me feel curious, happy, focused and exhilarated to discover by exploring different techniques."

T E N N E S S E E
C O U N C I L



DEVELOPMENTAL
DISABILITIES

ON THE COVER *glass flower*, Sadie Slack

Sadie Slack, of Clarksville, is on the autism spectrum and holds an undergraduate degree in cello performance. She will begin work towards a Master's degree this Fall. She enjoys doing art as a hobby.

CONTENTS

ART

glass flower [Cover](#)
Mindscape 702708 [2](#)
Blue Vacuum Cleaners [7](#)
Burlesque [11](#)
Croquet Game [11](#)
Autumn [12](#)
Stained Glass [12](#)
The Big Ben Country [15](#)
Cindy's belt, Walela buckle [15](#)
Life is for the Living [16](#)
Hard Days Work [16](#)
Untitled [17](#)
Taking a Nap [18](#)
A Peacock [18](#)
Kool-Aid Man 2 [18](#)
Expressionism of a Trumpet [19](#)
watermelon small [20](#)

POETRY

My Son [11](#)
The Wisest of the Pines [12](#)
Broken Pieces [15](#)
Harmonizing by the Susquehanna [16](#)
Iris [16](#)
Stumbling Blocks [18](#)

PHOTOGRAPHY

Pip [6](#)
Sick [7](#)
rainbow [12](#)

ARTICLES

POP Arts Enhances Skills,
Creates Community [4](#)
SENSE Theatre:
Building a Bridge to Belonging [8](#)
Molding a World Out of Clay [13](#)
Water Ballet [14](#)
Soundbeam [15](#)

PROSE

Life in a Bucket [6](#)
Realizing Robotz from Spare Parts [10](#)
Jack the Economist [19](#)

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POP Arts Enhances Skills, Creates Community

by Cynthia Chambers, PhD

There may be many reasons why we are drawn to a venue to see a performance, but POP Arts (Power of Performing Arts) hopes that you are drawn to its performances by the possibilities. POP Arts is an inclusive performance arts program for individuals of all abilities, Kindergarten through age 30. In January, 2011, Dr. Cynthia Chambers, an assistant professor in the Special Education program at East Tennessee State University (ETSU), and Ms. Kathleen Buttolph, a graduate student in the Master of Arts in Teaching program at ETSU, partnered with university students and Tricities community members to create POP Arts. POP Arts' mission is to provide a safe, strengths-based environment to facilitate the talents of individuals with and without disabilities.

In January, POP Arts announced its first audition and individuals with and without disabilities showed up from across the Tricities. POP

Arts used the audition process to identify cast members' strengths and interests, and to consider the types of roles for which an individual may be suited. The auditions involved dancing, acting and singing activities, with modifications as necessary, keeping in mind that everyone would have a role in this program. POP Arts adopts a philosophy of inclusion, recognizing that all individuals have a place to contribute and to grow.

Once the auditions were complete, the POP Arts cast was born! A total of 23 individuals, with and without disabilities, formed POP Arts' first cast, including individuals with Down syndrome, CHARGE Syndrome, autism spectrum disorders, attention deficit disorder and learning disabilities. POP Arts utilized a workshop model to allow cast members to develop in the areas of music, dance, acting, storytelling and script development. The workshops were held two to

three times per week.

"All instruction is designed to move with the student and be flexible to his or her needs," said Ms. Buttolph. "Though a workshop or coursework time period may end in a production, POP Arts is not production-driven. POP Arts is all about the process—finding what works for the individual and working with that individual as if they are learning any other new skill; teaching them to master that skill, hoping that they retain the skill."

Volunteer and future special educator, Christie Culbertson, said, "One of my favorite things about this group was our willingness to tweak anything that needed it to meet the unique and individual needs of everyone involved. If it didn't work the first time, we found a way that it would; a way that anyone who wanted to could participate in the performance in their very own way."

In April, the POP Arts cast performed their first production, *Everyday People*, which highlighted dances, group songs, solos, original scripts by cast members with disabilities and various acting scenes. On performance nights, there were lots of emotions in the air. Everyone was excited! Cast members and volunteers were nervous and anxious. POP Arts co-founders were optimistic, but knew that no workshop or rehearsal had ever gone the same. They hoped that the hard work and growth of the cast members would be revealed during the production.

On opening night, 165 people attended; 145 people came the second night. Everyone was amazed! "I was very nervous before the performance, because my son, who has autism, has a very short attention span and gets nervous in crowds," said Amy Wenk, who also had two children without disabilities participating in the program. "I was amazed at how well he did. I really liked that he had a buddy with him the entire time to help him through the performance. We were thrilled when we saw Jared singing and dancing along with all the others in the POP Arts cast."

Although the first POP Arts production was a success, the true accomplishment took place across the weeks of workshops and rehearsals. For many individuals, POP Arts became a place to develop performance as well as life skills. For others, POP Arts became a family, or a place to belong. Beth Miller, parent of an adult with autism, indicated, "Communication has always been a challenge for Catherine, but when she performs in front of a live audience, she becomes self-confident and takes to her characters with confidence and ease. Having a program like POP Arts has added dimensions to these children's lives that they may not otherwise have had the opportunity to experience."

Tracy Gott, parent of a child with autism, remarked, "For the past two years, we haven't had anything to go to outside of school. I had been praying for something for Will to do and POP Arts was like a message from God. POP

Arts has been a life saver. It has given Will strategies for life in the community and at school. Through the arts, this was the one thing he could do that allowed him to shine in life."

Kaitlin Bevins, a future special educator and POP Arts volunteer, shared, "[POP Arts] made me realize that going outside of the box and trying new ways to teach or learn from other individuals and participants provides more growth in both the participant and the facilitator."

Mary Isley, parent of a son and a daughter with and without autism, stated, "[POP Arts] has given us a brighter outlook on [our children's] futures... it has opened up a new set of possibilities."

Ms. Wenk said, "ALL of my children have grown from POP Arts. It has given them so much self-confidence. My outgoing child enjoyed it thoroughly, my shy child came out of his shell and really shined, and my child who is told the word 'can't' over and over, was told he CAN and he did!"

"I guess what has surprised me the most is not the number of people that came out to be a part of POP Arts," concluded Ms. Buttolph. "I think that the desire to perform will always be popular. For me, the surprise was how everyone worked so hard for each individual person. Support was everywhere. Not just for the cast members, but for each other. Through POP Arts, parents found support through conversations with other parents; college students found support in their education outside the classroom; cast members found the support of new friends that they may not normally seek or that may not normally seek them at school or in the community; instructors found support in new ways to teach; every person found support, in that there was a place for all in POP Arts."

POP Arts has definitely opened the door to possibilities; those that were expected and those that were never anticipated. For more information on POP Arts, contact Cynthia Chambers at siblings@etsu.edu or 423-439-7586.



Photo by Cindy Chambers



Photo by Erica Yoon



Photo by Cindy Chambers



Photo by Erica Yoon



Pip, Karen Golightly

LIFE IN A BUCKET

by Karen Golightly

Last summer I took my three kids to Costa Rica to meet two other families. For most families, this would be a pretty big feat. For me, a bit more than that. I'm a single mother of three children, 14, 11, and 5. The five year old, Pip, has autism, mostly manifested in transitions and lack of much verbal communication. So, let's drag the crew to a third-world country, where I've never been before and don't speak the language, during the rainy season. I figured we'd done Disney the year before; Costa Rica would be a breeze.

There were a few problems. I didn't figure in the fact that they wouldn't have an automatic transmission car at the rental agency, or that I'd have to drive four hours, over a treacherous mountain range, in a huge pick-up truck with a camper on the back, with my 14-year-old daughter navigating. I didn't even consider the fact that we'd be cooking all of our own meals in an outdoor kitchen with no hot water, that there would be hours and hours of no electricity, and certainly sketchy Internet (I teach online), and that the mosquitoes hadn't been fed in years there. I also didn't realize that it was a new moon, hence, huge tides, which washed out the only road onto the tiny island where we were staying.

But I also didn't realize what a brave little boy I'm raising. I had no idea that he could handle a five-hour flight, complete with a layover in Atlanta, then a four-hour drive across the country, and then, the next day, a hike through a rainforest, over a series of slippery, rickety suspension bridges in the rain. And

that, at the end, he'd love the icy cold waterfall and swimming hole as much as the rest of us did. I didn't think he'd find such joy in the black sands, liquid like quicksand, sprinkled with orange and green rocks and sand dollars as big as your palm. I didn't think that he'd look at the waves and, all of a sudden, be at peace, washed of the anxiety that grips him at times. I couldn't fathom that he'd jump with excitement at the sight of his sister riding a horse down the beach. And I had no idea that he'd love napping in a hammock, but he did.

Before we left home, Pip slept in the top of a wheelbarrow bucket on the floor in my room. It was his own creation, from a wheelbarrow that I hadn't had a chance to assemble. He piled in pillows and his blankets, and snuggled down every night for a year, despite my efforts to move him to a bed or out of my room. But after Costa Rica, I hung a hammock in his room, and he moved right into it, cherishing the comfort and pressure of the fabric against his little body. He made that corner his room, decorating it with his drawings, his name, posters, his puppet theater, toys, and books. It was the first time he'd made his own space, and he led the way, the hammock as the center of attention.

While in Costa Rica, my friend's four-year-old son constantly called to her. "Momma, I need a drink." "Momma, I want more cereal." "Momma, I need you to read me a book." "Momma, I need help. Now!"

At one point, I looked at her and joked, "Sometimes it's okay that I have a nonverbal child."

But last October, we were going for a walk, and Pip saw all of the Halloween decorations out. "Momma," he said, "look at that pumpkinin."



Blue Vacuum Cleaners, Joey McNinch

Joey McNinch is six years old and lives in Mount Juliet. Mr. McNinch has autism and draws his vacuum cleaners from memory.



Sick, Michael Murphy

Michael Murphy is an attorney in Morristown.

"Momma, look, a witch." "Momma, there's a ghost!"

It's continued, this Momma-ism, constantly it seems, to all aspects of his life. And then one day, he said, "Momma, I had a dream."

"What was it about?"

"A tree," he said, obviously pleased with himself.

"A tree" it's been every day since, except one, when it was a circus and a tree. Still, he's telling me his dreams, and for that I am thankful. I'll take the "Momma's" all day long, as long as he's talking.

When we left Costa Rica, we were all exhausted. We had ziplined, learned to surf, ridden horses, tromped through national parks and rainforests, and swum in the most beautiful ocean I'd ever seen. We'd ridden over a mountain range, filled up the rental truck at a gas station that was patrolled by armed guards, negotiated San Jose long enough to turn in the truck at the rental agency, and took a shuttle, with our two fifty-pound suitcases and four backpacks, to the airport—all in the span of six hours. We stood in line to pay the exit taxes (surprise!) and filled out a lengthy form for each person in our party. We stood in yet another line to get our boarding passes and check in

our luggage. Needless to say, lines are difficult for Pip. But he was a trooper until they loaded our two giant blue suitcases onto the conveyor belt. It was as if the last vestige of the familiar was taken away. He was inconsolable. I tried everything from saltines and gummy bears to Coca-Cola and a Ring Pop (my back up to my back up plan). Nothing worked. He screamed and cried, reaching for the luggage, which was clearly gone into the hinterlands of the San Jose airport, screaming, "My suitcase! My suitcase!"

I practically dragged him through security, where he freaked out even more when he had to remove his shoes, then the restaurant area, then the rest of the airport, through construction, to get to our terminal. I was sweating by the time we arrived. There, a Costa Rican man was playing what most might consider obnoxious native music (quite loudly, I'll add). But not Pip; that was the thing that calmed him down. He sidled up to a window for the best view of the airplanes and soaked in that music like a dream. His brave farewell to Costa Rica.

Karen B. Golightly is the mother of three children, Bella, Phin and Pip. She is also an assistant professor of English at Christian Brothers University in Memphis. Pip was diagnosed with autism at age three, and continues to grow, learn and teach his family and friends about his view of the world.

SENSE Theatre: Building a Bridge to Belonging

by *Blythe Corbett*

Photos by Joseph Howell, Vanderbilt University



The theatre is a magical place that allows us to see, feel and act in ways beyond everyday life. As Stella Adler, the renowned actress and teacher, said, “The word theatre comes from the Greeks. It means the seeing place. It is the place people come to see the truth about life and the social situation.” For me, as founder of SENSE Theatre—a stage of hope for children with autism—it is also a place where children with autism can learn about life and the social situation.

Before going to college to become a clinical scientist, I spent many years in the theatre learning about verbal and nonverbal communication, character development, emotional expression, story telling and movement—lessons that extended well beyond the footlights to my daily world. Acting requires expertise in many of the same skills that are significantly delayed or particularly challenging for children with autism spectrum disorders. Could it be that the masters of human interaction, actors, could serve as teachers or expert models for youth with autism? The answer became clear to me through the establishment of SENSE TheatreSM, expressly created to improve the social and emotional functioning of children with autism.

SENSE Theatre is a place where children with autism share the stage with youth actors without disabilities to learn and explore in a novel, inclusive and interactive setting. While the campers with autism have the opportunity to advance their skills in critical areas of social communication and expression, the typically developing peer actors have the chance to use their talents in valuable and lasting ways.

Initially established in California, SENSE Theatre opened its first Summer

Camp locally in June, 2011, in collaboration with the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center and the University School of Nashville Theatre Guild. The first day was a flurry of organized chaos as 12 campers with autism spectrum disorders were greeted by 12 enthusiastic peer actors offering broad, expressive smiles; glistening eye contact; clear, projecting voices; and outstretched, graceful hands that moved constantly as they talked. The colorful mix of theatrical games, singing, dancing and imagination activities evolved into roles for each of the participants.

With each new line, step and prop, the campers’ perceptible anxieties seemed to gradually diminish. They were, after all, being enveloped into the theatre and finding the stage to be a fun, safe and supportive place to try out these new ways of thinking, feeling and, well, acting.

In the background, the SENSE lab research project is designed to determine if the camp experience results in improvement in social communication and a reduction in stress similar to our earlier pilot work. Regardless of whether the objective standardized tests show measurable changes, the subjective reactions of the children convince me that we’re touching them in meaningful ways. “Dr. Corbett, this is my favorite camp ever!” offered Bradley, one of the young campers with autism. His effervescent sentiment was echoed later that night by another camper, 17-year-old Morgan Vice. “I love camp!” she spontaneously exclaimed to her mother, who was thrilled by her unrehearsed and genuine enthusiasm.

“This is very unusual,” said Tammy Vice. “Normally, when I ask Morgan if she enjoyed something, her reply would be a monotone, ‘yeah, uh-huh’.” Since Morgan doesn’t initiate, she often gets left out of activities. In other programs, I would find her in the corner on a computer or curled up in a beanbag chair, but not here! The peers just keep pulling her back in. They find creative ways to engage her. I see her smile and hear her laughter. She is enjoying being a real part of the group.”

Each camper and peer were cast in roles commensurate with their ability in an original show that I wrote for them called *Bridges*, a lyrical play about belonging. It is the story of a boy longing for friendship, who follows a whimsical guide on a journey to discover that if you want to have friends, you need to be a friend. This is not unlike many of our youth with autism and other disabilities, who, despite being separated by their differences from peers, long to belong and have friends.



When asked what it's like to share the footlights with children with autism, seasoned University School of Nashville (USN) graduate and Yale-bound actor, Tim Creavin, remarked, "Working with these kids was an incredible learning experience. Their wild imagination and joyful appreciation for the theatre allowed me to discover a much greater sense of honesty and purpose in my work as an actor. I can only hope that I'll have the opportunity to share the stage with these remarkable human beings again in the future."

The finale of the SENSE Theatre Summer Camp played out in two memorable public performances of *Bridges*, directed by Catherine Coke, USN Theatre Director, on Friday and Saturday, June 17 and 18, at the University School of Nashville. A parent of one of the campers, Barbara Early, who admitted to laughing and crying at the same time, said, "The SENSE Theatre Camp experience has been amazing for my son. I felt sure Bradley would enjoy the camp and he has had a wonderful time. I didn't expect to see so many

positive changes in his confidence, self-esteem and independence in such a short period of time. He sings the songs and talks about the play to anyone who will listen, including calling family members and using the phone for a microphone to perform for them. The excitement and happiness I see on his face at the end of each camp day is truly priceless!"

I guess there is something to be said about sharing the stage to allow the true talent in all of us shine a bit brighter.

Blythe Corbett, PhD, is founder of SENSE Theatre and assistant professor in the Department of Psychiatry at Vanderbilt University.

For more information on SENSE Theater, visit www.sensetheatre.com. To read about the SENSE lab research project, see Corbett, B.A., Gunther, J., Comins, D., Price, J., Ryan, N., Simon, D., Schupp, C.W., Rios, T. (2011). Theatre as therapy for children with autism. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 41 (4). 505-511.

Realizing Robotz from Spare Parts

by *Elizabeth Ann Ritchie*

John Ryan Lee has been fascinated by electrical parts since his adolescence. His dad was part owner of an electrical store in Knoxville, and his parents, John and Susan, would take him with them to the store on weekends. After watching a salesman at the store build a robot out of spare electrical parts, John Ryan began creating his own. His robots used cables, smoke detectors and electrical boxes.

Over the years, Mr. Lee's robots—now called Robotz—have assumed many more shapes and sizes. He also has added lights and fans that he wires himself, and made a variety of animals and other figures out of assorted parts.

Mr. Lee is a 26-year-old adult with autism, who, because of being non-verbal, "talks" with a communication board and cards. He also gestures or cuts out pictures of items he needs for one of his projects. "His Robotz started as an inexpensive way to keep him occupied at the store," said Susan Lee.

However, Mr. Lee has always been creative. Before his Robotz, he collected corks to make wreaths and bulletin boards, and crocheted latch hook rugs. His current hobby is much more complicated, requiring him to figure out how to make toes out of screw-in plugs, a head out of an octagon box or eyes out of duplex rectangles.

The Robotz creator currently lives in one of Breakthrough's (a state agency for adults with autism) supported living homes in Knoxville. His Robotz have become the agency's "trade mark" and are used for trophies at golf tournaments. In fact, Ernie Els and Vince Gill both have one! Robotz also are auctioned at fundraising events, featured on 5k race T-shirts and even were given to each of Tennessee's legislators when Mr. Lee was recognized in both houses with a joint resolution proposed by then Senator Tim Burchett.

Of most importance, Mr. Lee's love for electrical parts and fascination with his Robotz has enabled him, through Breakthrough's vocational services, to obtain employment with Harbor Freight Tools, where he is a valued employee!



Photos by Susan Lee

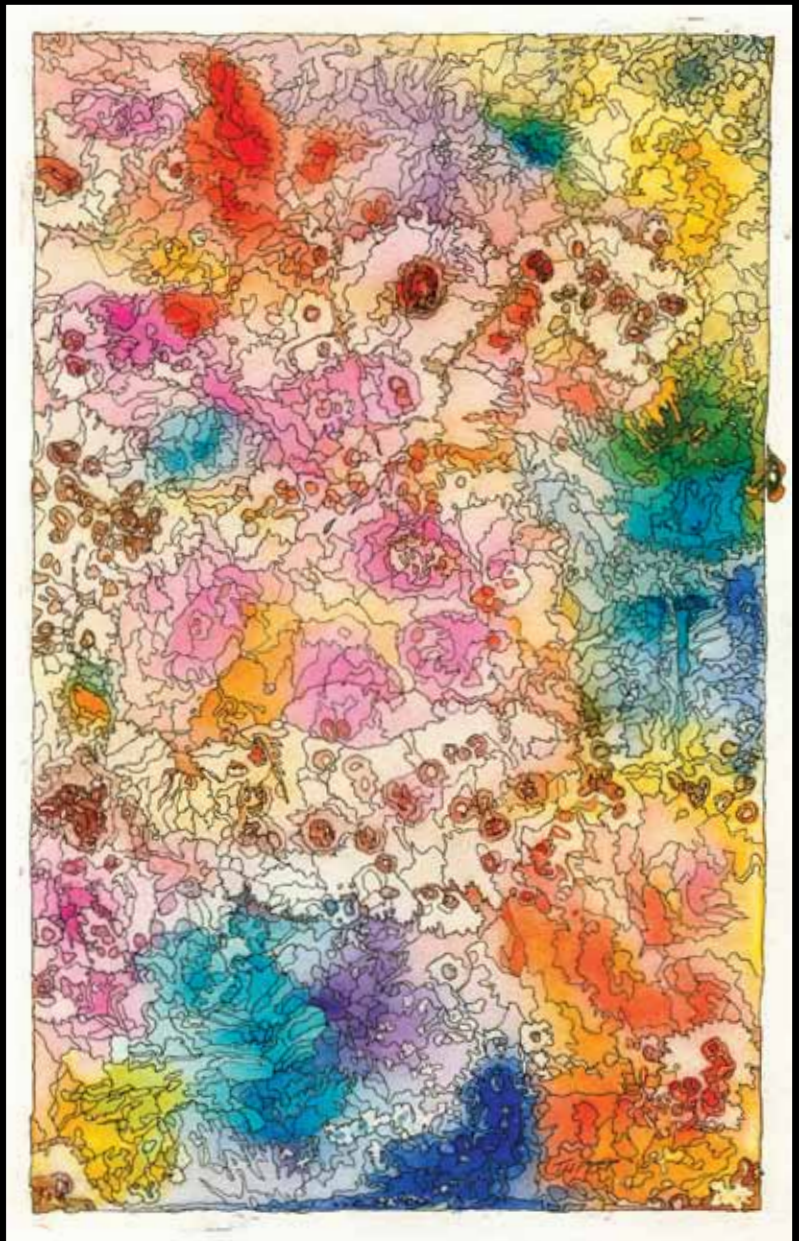
Elizabeth Ann Ritchie lives in Knoxville and has adult twin boys on the autism spectrum. Ms. Ritchie is a member of the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities.

MY SON

by Deb Clark

Physically he is 31
Emotionally he is 13
He cannot drive
I am his taxi
He doesn't hang out with friends
I am his playmate
He says his computer hates him
I tell him a computer has no feelings
He asks me how I'm doing
I tell him fine
He asks me 20 more times
I tell him fine 20 more times
He throws himself into the wall
It only hurts him, not the wall
He loves bowling, wrestling, video games and
dvd's
That is his world
Someone teases him
He doesn't get it; he gets mad
The world sees Asperger's
I see love
Love in its purest form
I wouldn't trade him for anything
Ask me tomorrow
I might give him to you
He is my world
He is my son
Gentle, caring, loving
My son

Deb Clark lives with her husband, Willie, and their son, Jesse, in Nolensville. All three work at Franklin Lanes, where Jesse is loved by employees and customers alike.



Burlesque, Kathy Tupper

Croquet Game, Laura Hudson

Laura Hudson lives in Nashville and is part of the Healing Arts Project, Inc. "Making art gets out voices, it gets rid of my depression because I have to make my drawings come to life. I can go any place in the world through my art work."





Autumn, Lynn Brown McGruder

Lynn Brown McGruder of Nashville is part of the Healing Arts Project, Inc. "Creating artwork symbolizes a new start. It gives me a chance to finally share something positive with other people."



Stained Glass, Robert Guy White

Robert Guy White, Nashville, is part of the Healing Arts Project, Inc. "Through art there is healing and justice."



rainbow, Anna Richardson

Anna Richardson lives in Middle Tennessee and is a brain injury survivor who is still recovering. She hopes to help others with similar disabilities through the creative arts.

THE WISEST OF THE PINES

by Julia McClary

Take me to the forest lands
and give me a poor man's
calloused hands.
I want to chop wood
where the honor of the beaver
is still well-understood.
I want to never hear
the blue bells weep
and walk where the trilliums
on the steep hills sleep.

The hopeful trees know
that I am coming
as I bravely tiptoe down
the narrow skunk paths
where no one else ever goes.
I saw the red maples sigh,
and the lonely black pines cry.
Then I hit the brittle wood
with my mighty ax
and put raw nuts into a guinea sack
When the western sky turned grey
I was quickly on my way.
I left my aching mind
on the mossy slopes
with the tallest and wisest of pines
and in the morning, I thought,
I'll make a keg of humble wine.

Copyright 6/12/10 Julia A. McClary

Julia A. McClary lives in Chattanooga, where she tends her small garden and cats. She also cooks delicious Southern meals for her family.

Molding a World Out of Clay

by Ned Andrew Solomon

Ashley Jackson first realized she wanted to be a sculptor when she was in elementary school. "I got really interested in making things with sculptures when I started playing with Play-Doh," said Ms. Jackson. "I would try to use my imagination, look at it and see what images I could create with my hands."

Totally blind from a very young age due to an operation, Ms. Jackson did not have "memories" of objects or creatures as models. Her creations took their form from the young artist "always touching things". "My favorite thing to make was babies," Ms. Jackson recalled. "I really loved babies very much and started making them out of Play-Doh. I think I was obsessed with them!"

Ms. Jackson is also severely hard of hearing and uses a combination of a microphone system and an interpreter, who signs by hand, to communicate with others. Fortunately, neither limitation appears to inhibit her creativity in any way.

At about 10 years old, Ms. Jackson progressed from Play-Doh creations to using clay that could be baked in a kiln, for more permanent results. Besides babies, her repertoire expanded to making pots and bowls. "My family told me I'd become famous one day, if I continued making things with clay," laughed Ms. Jackson.

Maybe not a "household name" yet, but word of her beautiful art is certainly getting around. Ms. Jackson recently came in 2nd—out of 396 entries—in the nationwide American Printing House for the Blind Insights Art Contest. She also had a VSA Tennessee, the State Organization on Arts and Disability, one-woman showing of her work at the Sumner County Convention and Visitor's Bureau this year.

Ms. Jackson is a rising senior at Tennessee School for the Blind (TSB). She lives on campus and has been enrolled there for 14 years, traveling home on the weekends to her family's house in Chattanooga.

Surprisingly, especially after witnessing her accomplished pieces, Ms. Jackson has not "officially" taken any art classes or training until this past year. Now she takes Art History with

eight other students with visual disabilities and meets twice a week in the afternoons with TSB art instructor, Monica Leister.

"I love Ashley's art," said Ms. Leister. "I think she has her own unique style that is aesthetically exceptional and it tells a story about her life and her experiences. Perhaps her art will help others connect to what her world is like, especially being deaf and blind.

"I have worked with Ashley after school, one-on-one for a couple of years, strictly with making sculptures," continued Ms. Leister. "However, she does 100% of it. I'm just there to make suggestions, give advice and help her with coming up with ideas. Ashley does the rest."

Besides working with clay, Ms. Jackson has tried to draw and paint on canvas. She also dabbles in writing fiction short stories and has won writing competitions against writers with and without disabilities. But her heart is in sculpture.

Although Ms. Jackson sometimes checks the accuracy of her creations with a sighted person to be sure she has all the details correct, I just had to ask her how, being blind, she knew that a particular piece was finished. "It's not always easy to know," Ms. Jackson said. "With most pieces, I just have a habit of feeling all over the place and making sure everything's perfect. I just keep feeling and thinking about whether there's something I need to add or change."

Ms. Jackson sees her life after high school as another one of her "works in progress". She talks about setting up in a spot where she can have fun selling her pots, bowls and other art objects. She also has considered becoming a teacher or a social worker because she loves working with people and helping others feel better about themselves.

She would like to be an inspiration to others, through sharing her unique gifts. "I don't know of very many deaf-blind people who are making wonderful art pieces or can master that kind of skill," said Ms. Jackson. "I've always wondered how I'd be able to make sculptures and make



The First Braille Lesson

Photo by Scott Andrews



Photo by Monica Leister



Sand Angels

Photo by Monica Leister

On one of my camping trips in Florida, I was by the ocean," said Ms. Jackson. "It was my first time being at the ocean. I had never thought about making sand angels before. I was just sculpting with the sand on the ground and looking up at the sun."

them look so real. I guess it's just because I have a special way of thinking about them."

Another way she shares her gifts is by actually giving one of her sculptures to people in her life with whom she's had a special connection, or who have influenced her, positively, on her journey. "I want them to have something to remember me by," said Ms. Jackson.

Ned Andrew Solomon is director of the Partners in Policymaking™ Leadership Institute for the Council on Developmental Disabilities.



Water Ballet

by Rick Rader, MD

Swimming skills. Synchronous routines. Ease and grace. Timing, flexibility and agility. These are not the notions that typically come to mind as attributes of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. But, once again, this has proven to be part of the legacy of low expectations. The Orange Grove Center in Chattanooga has tapped into these very skills in the creation of its nationally renowned Water Ballet Troupe.

Water ballet—also known as synchronized swimming—was started by an Australian, Annette Kellerman, in the late 1800s as a self-conceived therapy for her bone disease. She borrowed movements from classical ballet and it was not only effective for her condition but exciting for spectators to watch. It eventually caught on and evolved from a single performer to an entire team or troupe. To demonstrate the “sport” component of the movements, it became an official Olympic event in 1984.

The Orange Grove Water Ballet Troupe was established in 2008 under the leadership of Courtney Miles, a ballet dancer with the Chattanooga Ballet Troupe. The program started with school age participants and was so successful it also was offered to adults. The response was overwhelming. Individuals who you would not have expected to take an interest in swimming, dance or team participation raised their hands and showed up for the initial class—and were hooked. Ms. Miles was assisted by Teresa Jenkins, Orange Grove’s Physical Education Teaching Assistant, and together they were able to transform these tadpoles into a team that turned traditional ballet moves into a series of water moves that have literally astonished spectators.

In addition to the positives of team participation and the inter-reliance of its members, the hidden benefits alone justify the program. The water provides low impact resistance, enhancing muscle strength, tone, flexibility and agility. The warmth of the water is therapeutic to joints and muscles, and contributes to overall relaxation. The class meets every two weeks for 30

minutes and currently consists of 13 school age students and 14 adults. Literally any type of disability can be accommodated, with plans to accept all levels of disabilities.

This was Ms. Miles’ first exposure to teaching ballet to individuals with disabilities and it has provided her with a new appreciation for the dynamics of dance, personal expression and how learning ballet can translate into life skills. In addition to Ms. Miles and Ms. Jenkins, the entire staff has been invited to participate as water assistants. There is something remarkable and transformative when caregivers enter the same environment as the performers. No longer are the barriers that are so apparent on land and serve to magnify the “differences” in evidence. When caregiver and performer are “together” in the pool, a newfound equality is announced and understood.

Orange Grove has long understood and appreciated that breaking barriers often results in “game-changing” realizations, not only for individuals, their staff and their families, but for onlookers. For the performers at Orange Grove one thing is certain: “Dancing with the feet is one thing, but dancing with the heart is another.” One of the beauties of water ballet is that it can be viewed without the insertion of the word “disability”. This is not water ballet for performers with disabilities, this is simply water ballet. And that alone will insure that this program is kept afloat.

Rick Rader, MD, is director of the Morton J. Kent Habilitation Center at Orange Grove Center and is currently serving as acting director of Health Care Services.



Photos by Dennis Wilkes,
Orange Grove Center

Soundbeam

by Rick Rader, MD



Few could argue with Plato when he offered, "Music and rhythm find their way into the secret places of the soul." But for people with complex disabilities, the question is often "How do you reach those 'secret places' and how do you unleash them?"

While the Orange Grove Center in Chattanooga has had an award-winning music program for decades,

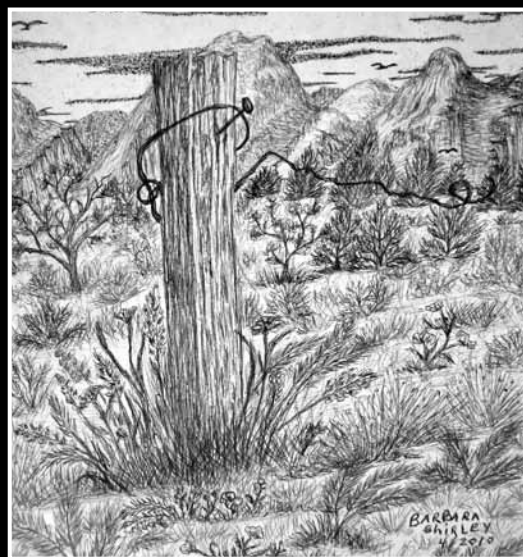
there remained one elusive piece of the creative pie—including individuals with multiple confounding and complex disabilities. Challenges with coordination, communication, motor control, sensory processing, attention, focus and cognition have long relegated those individuals to the sidelines. However, under the tutelage of Monty Parks, the Music Director of Orange Grove, there are no longer any "sidelines". With the support of a grant from the Community Foundation of Greater Chattanooga, Orange Grove has incorporated the Soundbeam system into its repertoire.

Soundbeam uses sensor technology to translate body movement into digitally generated sound and image. According to its British creators, "Its success rests upon two factors: the sensitivity of the beam means that even the most immobilized individuals can 'play' independently; secondly, electronic technology makes available a huge palette of possible soundworlds, releasing the player from the traditional limitations of percussion-based activity. The sense of control, agency and independence which this provides can be a powerful motivator, stimulating learning and interaction in other areas."

Mr. Parks is amazed not only by the quality of the music that his students have crafted, but by the enthusiastic response of the other students listening and watching the music being created in front of their eyes. Soundbeam is multi-dimensional, allowing multiple "players" to co-create music as a duet or ensemble. It also provides additional insights into "cause and effect", "personal influence" and "incentives to mastery", three educational goals that transcend the music room.

The best way to imagine what transpires with Soundbeam is to visualize someone conducting an imaginary orchestra. Now, take away the baton and minimize the exaggerated hand and arm movements that you see conductors making. Minimize them even more...right down to a puff of a cheek, flutter of a finger or twitch of a nose. The most minimal of body fluctuations can create music with Soundbeam. The music is not "canned" and it's not "on-off activated". It is real-time, real-world, made-as-it-happens, just as traditional music is created.

While Orange Grove appreciates the "Buck Rogers" technology and uses it to its full capacity, it is no substitute for a dedicated, caring and talented teacher like Mr. Parks. A smiling teacher, who is there to say, over and over and over again, "Okay that sounded great; now let's take it from the top. This time with more verve!"



The Big Ben Country in Texas, Barbara Shirley

Barbara Shirley, Nashville, is part of the Healing Arts Project, Inc. "My illness gives me the talent of seeing shapes and shadows....Putting what I see on paper makes me show to others what calmness I feel."



Cindys belt, Walela buckle, Charlie Jo Shemwell

Charlie Jo Shemwell resides in Camden. He is the only cowboy silversmith east of the Mississippi doing custom leather, bits, buckles, spurs, and metal engraving.

BROKEN PIECES

by Brian C. McHan

If you think somebody is better than you
remember you have abilities too.
We all have broken pieces and flaws
it's all a part of nature's laws.
So if someone else is too fast
don't let envy last.
Just find the time and the place
to win at your own race.

Brian C. McHan lives in Jackson. Mr. McHan is a Partners in Policymaking graduate (01-02) and is dealing with schizophrenia.



Life is for the Living, Erin Brady Worsham

Erin Brady Worsham is a recognized artist, writer and speaker in the disability community. Ms. Worsham and her family were recently featured in the Ryan Michaels Band video of their song, "Life is for the Living", which inspired this piece.

Iris

by David S. Pointer

Her progressive disease
was anything but—it
was archaic even feeling
evil, and painful, so she
cast off those bedridden
ideas about mobility
limitations along with
another bundle of the last
generations impenetrable
odds to finally push the
positive illusions away
like pillars to enjoy the
day shining bright as
Portuguese silver

David S. Pointer lives in Murfreesboro. He has just edited "Bleed Me A River: A Domestic Violence Anthology".

HARMONIZING BY THE SUSQUEHANNA

by Karen Webber Gilat

She does not dance on the Susquehanna,
even at its narrowest point where shallow banks wave
arms-length apart then clap hands.
Diminutive angel stands knee deep waiting, wading
in white tatters, butterfly hair-
my clementine breasted baby girl.

Swollen banks scream my son's name
current sputterlaps dangling feet
a hum rises in his head.
Butterflies light on her shoulders
he counts them backwards
licks his lips to a clown mouth
muttering of ghostly bear spirits
stuttering Beethoven's birth and death dates repeatedly aloud.

Sung prayers rise,
one fly passes.
He cups his hands over his ears
sounds like a cruise ship disembarking
passengers disassemble the hull
floating past on two by fours
singing 'wade in the water' in cut time
flapping to the Hudson Bay
all the way to Harrisburg
where the ice on the river is slowing.

Karen Webber Gilat lives in Morristown with her almost teenage daughter and 18-year-old son, both on the autism spectrum. This poem is "...about my children, and the blurring of art and reality."



Hard Days Work, Donald McFarland

Donald McFarland, of Clarksville, is part of the Healing Arts Project, Inc. He explains his art in fluid and colorful ways: "It brings back maybe the thought of something that happens, someone you are happy with, or the memory of a person..."



Untitled, Shelby Stewart

Shelby Stewart is in the Senior High program at Madonna Learning Center in Memphis. She has taken art classes at the Memphis College of Arts.



Taking a Nap, Shea Norman

Shea Norman, Murfreesboro, is part of the Healing Arts Project, Inc. "Creating art helps me to calm down, forget about problems and stay more focused."



A Peacock, Sebastian Wesley Norris Bakken

Sebastian Wesley Norris Bakken of Erwin is 10 years old. "I have [A]spergers syndrome & I love to draw."



Kool-Aid Man 2, Thaddaeus Tekell

Thaddaeus Tekell lives in Nashville and is part of the Healing Arts Project, Inc. "Creating art is a release, helps deal with dreams and hallucinations."

STUMBLING BLOCKS

by Heather Barrett

When I first learned to walk it was not like other kids do, I more or less just stumbled about wherever I went. (Not much has changed in 30+ years). As I grew, I graduated from a walker, to crutches and eventually to walking on my own, yet I actually just became a better stumbler. My favorite aid to assist me in the process was my father. My Daddy, in his prime, stood six feet seven inches tall! He was known among my friends as "The Giant!" Daddy was a very strong guy and this really showed when he was walking with me. I can't remember ever falling; somehow he always managed to catch me and keep me steady. Although Daddy couldn't physically keep me from stumbling, he did everything he could to keep me from falling. When I did fall, Daddy did everything he could to comfort me and encouraged me to get back up and try again. I have another Father who does the exact same thing! This is God. He is so big and strong. He holds me in His arms at all times. Even though He doesn't always remove all the stumbling blocks

from my life, He does guide me down the paths and He is there to pick me up when I fall. It has been a long time since I have gotten to stumble beside my Daddy. I grew up as little girls do and my paths did not always cross with his. I suppose the last time I got to stumble with him was down the church aisle at my wedding when he handed me over to the man that I will stumble my life away with. After I had my 2 precious babies, I had a hip replacement, which has helped my stumbling a lot. My Daddy is no longer here on this earth to stumble about with me. And even though when I reach heaven, I won't be stumbling anymore, I know that both my Fathers will be waiting to walk me down those streets of gold.

Heather Barrett lives in Murfreesboro. She has cerebral palsy, is married and has two children.

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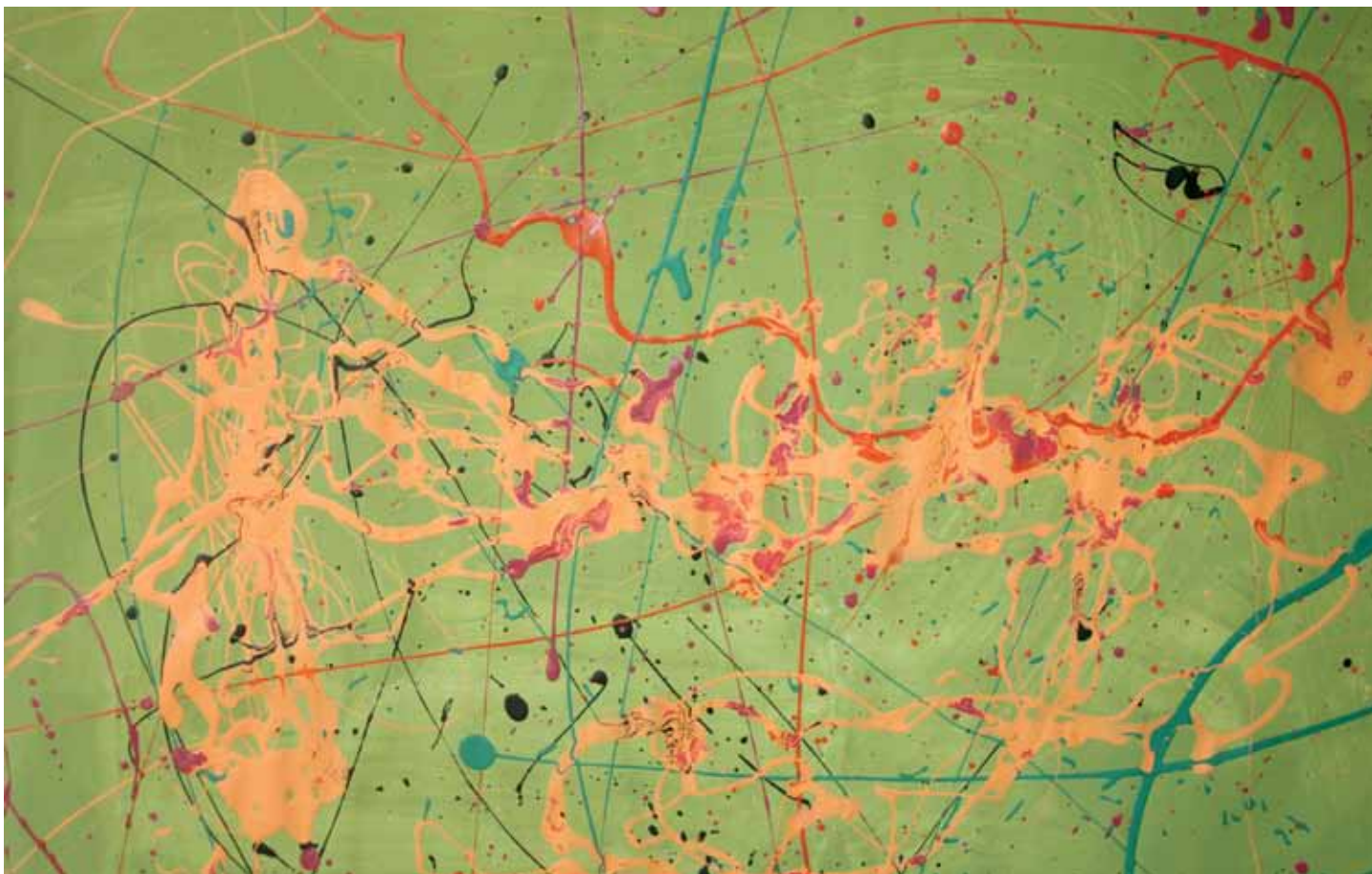
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Expressionism of a Trumpet, Bernie Lynette

Bernie Lynette is a thirteen-year-old boy who enjoys using technology. When he's not immersed in electronics, he can be found reading nonfiction and fantasy, contemplating physics, building incredible inventions or creating art from found objects and recycled materials.

JACK THE ECONOMIST

by Jo Ver Mulm

To say that Jack has preferences is an understatement. Jack has rules. We follow the rules because we've learned that though we don't always understand them, adhering to them makes life better. For all of us. My fellow autism moms will roger that, give me a hearty 10-4 and a high-five. They know.

Some of Jack's rules have to do with food. Thou shall not give him crunchy peanut butter. Do not drink milk from a clear glass in front of him or he will surely gag and vomit. He eats nothing orange except an orange because things that aren't **called** an orange should not **be** orange. Bananas aren't called yellows and tomatoes aren't called reds. It's a matter of principle. Got it? And then there's filling. He eats nothing filled. Not cake. Not cookies. Not donuts. Not ever.

So Father's Day morning I made the traditional 6 a.m. run to Donut Country for our favorite donuts so we could have breakfast in bed with Dad and I placed my order, bearing in mind the individual preferences of each member of our family because I'm the mom and there's infinite space in my brain for such facts like these, though I frequently go upstairs these days and forget why I'm up there. But anyhow, my selection did include several filled donuts because the grown-ups in our family like them.

After we gave thanks, Jack opened the box and asked me which donuts were filled. I pointed them out to him and then the strangest thing happened. Jack picked up a chocolate-filled bismark and, with all eyes upon him (I believe even the dog was holding her breath), he ate it.

No one said a word. Oh, we exchanged looks. Eyebrows were raised but there are not sufficient words to cover events such as these. Days later, I struggle still just to write about it.

Yesterday, Jack and I found ourselves with 30 free minutes between dropping sister off at camp and his diving lesson and we were near, of all places, Donut Country. We stopped and again he purposefully selected a chocolate-**filled** bismark and ate it.

Sensing with all my heart that a major breakthrough in either sensory processing or autism spectrum disorders, possibly both, was imminent I said, "Jack, what's with the filled donuts?"

And Jack said, "It's about value, Mom. There's no hole. No waste."

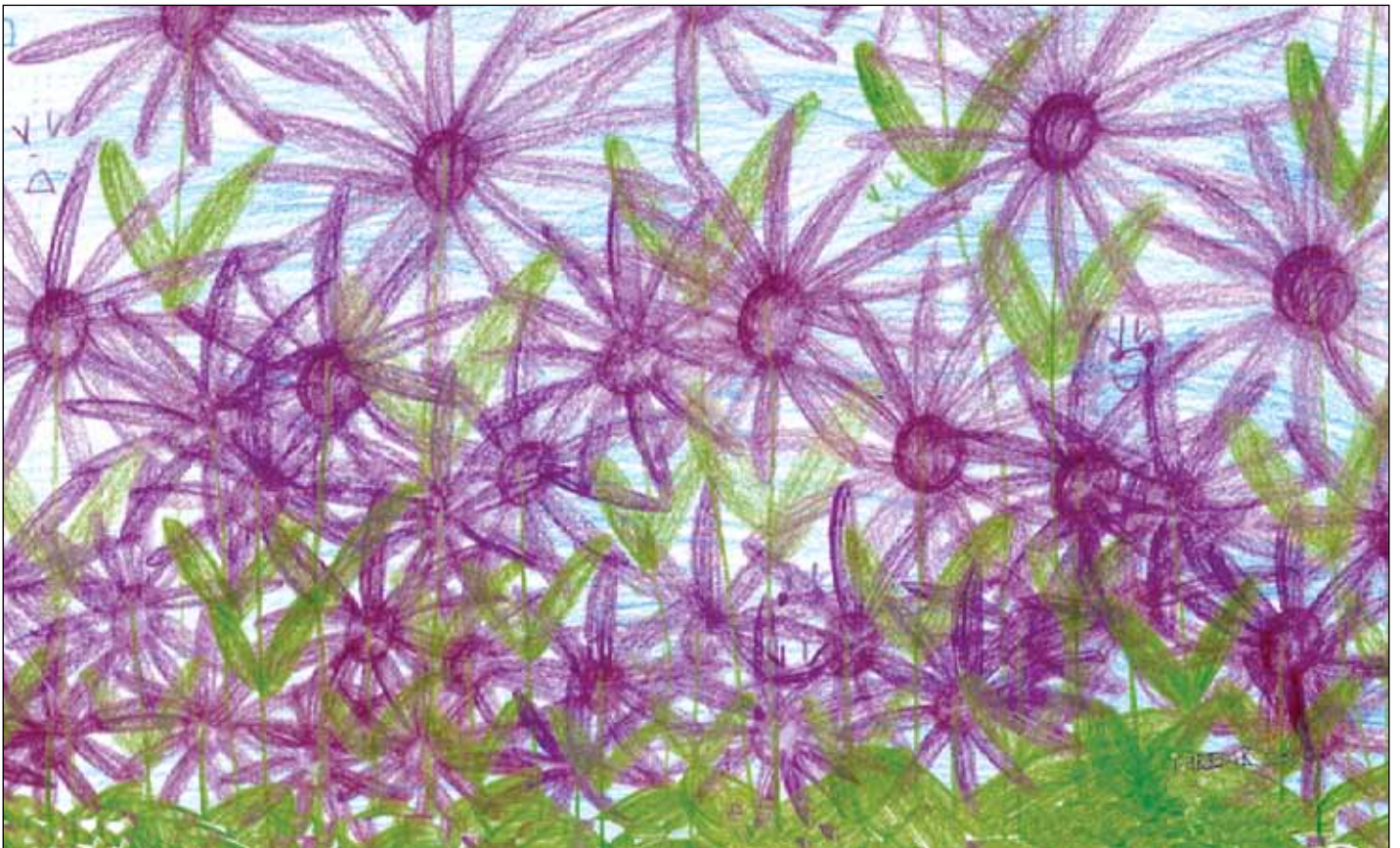
Jo Ver Mulm, Murfreesboro, is a Partners in Policymaking graduate (08-09).

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watermelon small, Derrick Freeman | *Derrick Freeman has autism and lives in Knoxville.*